WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A pharmaceutical composition comprising therapeutically effective amount of an inactivated varicella zoster virus (VZV) and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, wherein the VZV is inactivated by 5-25 kGy of gamma irradiation and wherein the infectivity of the VZV is ≤0.040 plaque-forming units (PFU's)/mL and wherein the inactivated VZV induces an immune response against VZV when administered to a patient.

2. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 1, wherein the infectivity of the inactivated VZV is ≤0.010 plaque-forming units (PFU's)/mL

3. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 2, wherein the infectivity of the inactivated VZV is ≤0.002 plaque-forming units (PFU's)/mL

4. The pharmaceutical composition of any of claims 2-3, wherein the VZV strain is an Oka strain or an Oka strain derivative.

5. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 4, wherein the composition is lyophilized.

6. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 1, wherein the immune response elicited by the composition differs from the immune response elicited by ~~the control sample by 50% or less from the immune response elicited by~~ a control sample comprising the same amount of the VZV that has not been inactivated by 50% or less.

7. The pharmaceutical composition of claim 6, wherein the immune response elicited by the inactivated VZV differs from the immune response elicited by the control sample by 25% or less.

8. The pharmaceutical composition of any of claims 2-3, wherein the infectivity of the VZV is determined by a varicella plaque assay.

9. A method of preparing an inactivated varicella zoster virus (VZV) comprising gamma irradiating a sample comprising a VZV using from 5 to 25 kGy of gamma radiation.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the gamma radiation is provided to the sample by exposing the sample to ^{60}Co rays.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the VZV is the Oka strain or an Oka strain derivative.

12. The method of claim 10, wherein the sample is lyophilized prior to being irradiated.

13. The method of claim 9, wherein the vaccine is a liquid bulk formulation and the amount of gamma radiation used is ~~about~~ from 5 kGy to 12.5 kGy.

14. The method of claim 9, wherein the amount of gamma radiation used is from 10 kGy to 25 kGy.

15. An inactivated VZV produced or obtainable by the method of any of claims 9-14.

16. A vaccine comprising a therapeutically effective amount of the inactivated VZV of claim 15 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

17. Use of an inactivated varicella zoster virus (VZV) for the manufacture of medicament for the treatment of herps zoster in a subject, wherein the VZV is inactivated with 5-25 kGy of gamma irradiation.